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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000186

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE

1. SUMMARY. The Commissioner of Police Mrs. 'Malejaka Evelyn Letooane paid a courtesy call on the Ambassador on Wednesday April 7, 2005. Their discussion focused on the current security situation and public safety in Lesotho. The Ambassador expressed concerns about recent attacks on expatriate residents. Commissioner Letooane noted the limited resources with which the law enforcement personnel force must try to do their job and the Ambassador offered to explore potential training and assistance.

END SUMMARY.

2. Responding to a comment by the Ambassador regarding the increasing crime rate, Letooane concurred with the Ambassador's observation that the crime is up. She informed the Ambassador that this was due to a number of factors such as unemployment, lack of manpower in the police service, juvenile delinquency by school dropouts and loitering in the streets by opportunistic criminals who desire affluent lifestyles in Maseru. The Commissioner also stated that the police are actively encouraging and assisting communities with skills to engage in Community Policing because of lack of manpower in the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (L.M.P.S.). During daytime, about 316 policemen and policewomen excluding the Special Operations Unit, are deployed around the city (mobile patrols, foot patrols) to deter criminals. Plain clothes police are also engaged.

3. Letooane was quick to emphasize that the L.M.P.S. officers are trying their level best to provide a high quality and efficient service but due to lack of resources, they have been unable to effectively carry out their duties. She went further that they have they could deploy as many as 500 Police officers around the city if resources (especially transport) were available. The Commissioner indicated that they have very few motorbikes, which are used mainly by the traffic police to escort VIPs. She stated that they are even considering the use of bicycles to counter the problem of transport for the police in Maseru. In addition, as a mounted police service, the L.M.P.S. do not have horses for Maseru urban areas. The animals are used only in the rural areas but L.M.P.S. has requested funds to get additional horses. The Commissioner cited an inadequate number of uniforms as another problem the LMPs they faces. She expressed concern that as many as 800 police officers have been without uniforms for close to over a year. Letooane indicated that her office has just received a positive response from the Ministry of Finance for purchasing the uniforms for those officers.

4. The Ambassador expressed concern about the safety of expatriates and Lesotho citizens. She mentioned recent incidents involving an American citizen who was attacked and stabbed in his house and British students who were mugged at knife point during daylight in the city. The Ambassador stressed that these incidents take place at a time when the Diplomatic Corps and other organizations are encouraging potential investors and other businesses to expand their operations in Lesotho. She emphasized that the rising crime rate could have detrimental effects on Lesotho's economy. The Commissioner indicated that she was aware of the unfortunate incident involving an American citizen and assured the Ambassador that the police were making every effort despite their limitations and expressed confidence that the culprit/s will be caught. Mrs. Letooane also noted additional steps being taken to combat crime. She attended a meeting with the Assistant Commissioner of Police for the central region (which includes Maseru) called by the acting Minister of Home Affairs and Public Safety aimed at devising strategies to increase the number of police on the streets and for patrolling in residential areas, especially those occupied by foreign nationals. She also stated that she has ordered District Police Commanders to visit and consult Peace Corps Volunteers all over the country to find whether they are secure and address their concerns.

5. The Commissioner of Police mentioned to the Ambassador that the Police are contemplating an operation aimed at removing people who roam the streets of Maseru day and night especially young people. Loiterers would be targeted because they are the ones who normally end up committing crimes. Responding to a question by the Ambassador about the existence of a training center for young people to draw them off the streets, the Commissioner indicated that it is a big problem because there are no facilities to accommodate them, train them and help them acquire skills which they can use to find jobs in order to lead a normal life. The Ambassador informed the Commissioner that the Embassy's human rights or self help funds may be able to provide assistance to hold seminars, particularly on young girls

and women's rights. Regarding security arrangements for the forthcoming local government elections, the Commissioner stated that they are currently training additional police assistants to be deployed around polling stations. She also indicated that the Crime Intelligence Unit has already been deployed to report anything suspicious prior to the elections. The Ambassador and Commissioner concluded their meeting by agreeing to enhance regular communications.

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16. (SBU) Comment: The Commissioner thanked the Ambassador for ILEA training to date and commented she had seen positive results. The Commissioner recognized the severe constraints faced by her force, particularly with lack of transport and training. We are acutely aware of the lack of protection in Maseru as are others in the diplomatic and business communities.
End Comment.

PERRY